

## ALL AROUND THE TOWN

I like it, winter or summer. But I guess I like it the best when it gets really hot and they turn on the fire hydrants for a while and the little kids splash in the water. That's when the noise lasts till after twelve and, if you look out of the window, you can see a man in his shirt sleeves and his fat wife beside him, sitting out in front of the store in a couple of kitchen chairs. I know nobody's supposed to. But that's the way I like New York.

No, I was born in Brooklyn, but I don't remember much about that. We moved to the East Side afterwards, before I could remember. The old man was a watch repairer—I guess that's where I get my liking for tinkering at things. He worked at Logan's, up on Fourteenth, and I remember how disappointed I was when I found he didn't own the whole store. He was Swiss and Ma was Irish, so I've got the two sides to me. They get along well enough, usually, but sometimes they fight.

I know now he had disappointments, but I didn't know it as a kid. He was always talking about a nice place in the country, with chickens, but he never got there. Once or twice, before I was born,—I came along kind of later,—he tried to set up in a small town. But something always happened, and he had to come back to the city. He didn't really object to it, but he felt it wasn't right to raise his kids there. But Ma always said it was up to her to take care of that. She did a good job by us, too, and she kissed me on both sides of my face when I got the silver medal for penmanship at St. Aloysius's. I didn't tell her it was because I'd promised Jerry Toole I'd beat the mush off him if he came in ahead of me. He was always the one to get the prizes, and I thought it was time I had one of my own to take home and show. My old man made a little wooden box for it and carved my initials on top. It took him quite a little while to do it,—he was a slow worker, but very careful,—but it pleased him a lot. And me, too.

I guess I don't know how to tell a story, because, when I think about it, it gets all mixed up. They ask you what was the city like, in those days, and what are you going to tell them? I remember the horsecars, to be sure, and the gaslights in the streets,



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and the tangle of overhead wires, like a crazy spiderweb, and the big white stages. But, when you begin thinking back, you don't know if you're right or not. My old man had big gray moustaches that went out like a pair of wings, and he always wore a derby hat to his work. It was rounder, somehow, than they make derbies now—I'd recognize it among a million, but they don't have them any more. And, when Ma was baking, you could smell the clean, fresh bread all over the house. The first policeman I ever saw was standing under a gaslight, twirling his stick in front of his belly. We called him Mister Ryan and I thought him the greatest and largest man in the world. Well, that's the thing you remember. That, and the sprinkling carts, and the brown afternoon in the street, and the old woman who sold hot chestnuts, with her cheeks as red as red apples, a winter evening, under the El, when the horses were slipping on the ice.

All the same, it wasn't so big, then. I remember when the Flat-iron was the biggest one and the out-of-town people bought postcards, just the way they do, this moment, with the Empire State. It got built without our knowing it, almost—it went up into the sky. Nobody decided about it—it stretched like a boy growing up, and now, there it is. The city, I mean—yes, the city. I remember my tall, laughing Irish uncles stamping into the house and swinging Ma from one to another of them and kissing her till she'd slap their faces. She was always little Katy, the bird, to them, though she'd had a great hand in bringing most of them up. I remember when Uncle Ally got in the Fire Department and his coming around, proud as Punch, to show us his new uniform. A well-set-up man he was, and his helmet very impressive. He was killed in a big loft fire in the garment district, the year that I was sixteen. The whole wall fell like a stone and they couldn't get the bodies for two days.

All the same, they gave the three of them a Department funeral and there were pieces in all the papers about it. I think it helped break Ma's heart—he was her favorite brother. But I rode in the carriage with her and she sat up straight as a ramrod, in her new black clothes. Afterwards she had me cut the pieces out of the papers, and it wasn't till night that I heard her crying. I can hear the cry in my ears, though it's many years gone.

My old man and my uncles were polite enough to each other, but they didn't really get along. He liked to sit out on the



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stoop, after dinner, smoking his big pipe with the silver lid on it and reading the evening paper. But he was a quiet man, and when my uncles came in, full of life and gayety, he'd have less to say than ever, though he always sent to the corner for the beer. He'd never have a drop of whiskey in the house, except for medical purposes—but he liked the steam beer at Schaeffer's, though I never saw him take too much. The day he came home with the chill, Ma made him a toddy, but even then he wouldn't take it. It scared me to see him in bed in the daytime, with his red-bordered nightshirt on. When you're young, you never think your parents can get sick or die. I remember that. But he got over it; and it wasn't till after I was married that he died.

He liked Eileen and she was very good to him—I'll always remember that. She used to call him Father Weiss,—she was dainty in her conversation,—but he'd always say, "Joost Poppa, *mein liebliches Kind*." Then he'd stroke her hand, very gently, with the tips of his big, clever fingers. That was after Ma had gone, and we had the responsibility. The girls did what they could, but, of course, they had their own families by then, except Nellie, and she wouldn't come to see him if any of the others were coming.

It wouldn't be held a disgrace, now—certainly not. The kids pray to go into the movies—and isn't that the same? But we held it a disgrace to us. I guess Nellie was my favorite sister—she took more after the uncles than the rest of us. She wasn't pretty, exactly, but she had a black-haired imp in her, and she was the first to marry of all the girls. I can see her face under the bridal veil, looking frightened. That's funny for Nellie O'Mara, the Wild Irish Rose. O'Mara was my grandda's name—she took it when she ran off with her piano pounder and started showing her legs on the public stage. The old man, queer enough, didn't mind so much—he had European ideas about the theatre. But Ma was horrified and so were the other girls.

I was horrified myself—I had to fight three boys on account of it. And Nellie's husband, Ed Meany, would come around and sit on the stoop, looking as if he'd just had a tooth pulled and telling all he'd done for Nellie, and how, even now, he'd been willing to take her back. He was a good man, no doubt, but he talked till you'd feel like shooting him. It wasn't till I had my own trouble that I knew how he felt.

The other girls married all right and respectable,—Grace and



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Kathleen,—though I never did think much of Carl Schuhmacher. He always looked too much like one of his own sirloin steaks, but that was Grace's affair, not mine, and the meat market's a good business. We thought she could have done better for herself, but I don't know, as things turned out. He had some trouble, during the war, till young Carl was killed at Cantigny. I guess he's forgotten the trouble—I don't mean forgotten young Carl. They've still got the picture in the parlor, and the uniform looks queer, now. But he and John Pollard—that's Kathy's husband—get on a lot better than they did. There was feeling between the two families for a long time, over the meat-carving set and the Irish lace doilies. Well, Grace was always a grabber, and she did her best to make John Pollard feel small. But he got to be principal of Van Twiller for six months before they retired him—and I've seen his office. He was the steady sort that works up, and they couldn't keep him out of the position, though they tried. Now he's got the testimonial framed and it means something to him. I know that by the way he looks at it, now and then. Their youngest's teaching at Hunter, and they make a lot of that.

## II

I can't say I've had a bad life, though it hasn't been quite what I expected. If I'd gone in with Uncle Martin—he was always the clever one! And I was his favorite, in a manner of speaking. But I couldn't stand the bother of politics—not even when he got to be district leader. He might have gone far, I think, but he picked the wrong side, in the Hall. That's the unforgivable mistake. Then, later on, he had his trouble—well, the jury disagreed at both trials. But it was all over the papers, and that sticks to a man. My clever, low-spoken uncle! I remember him always, a little disdainful of the rest of them, and you felt he took a drink to be friendly, and yet not to be really friendly. And then, at the trial, he was an old man, with jowls and white hair, answering just as clever and low-spoken as he always had, and yet not making a good impression. Because times had changed—that was all—and yet, how would he have done different? It was in his blood to rise by any means he could lay hands on, and pull up his



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family, too. But I'm glad that it didn't interest me—though he helped me get my first position.

Well, now, I was young and strong, though you might not think it. I wanted to go on the Force—but then the job came along. My old man wanted me to follow in his own line of business. But I didn't feel like messing around all day with little wheels and springs and an eyeglass stuck in one eye. They were building the Subway in those days—well, that's how I started. It was good pay, for the time, and I wanted to marry Eileen.

It's queer what a man's work in life will turn out to be. You go around the top of the city—well, I know that, too. But it's underneath where I've worked, the strong part of my life. You don't often get to thinking of it—a man's work is his work, wherever it lies. But, if it wasn't for thousands of men whose names you've never heard of, all living their lives underground, it wouldn't be a city, or the same city. I'd think of it, now and again, on the night shift, when things got quiet above. They'd have gone to sleep by then,—yes, even the rich and proud,—but we'd be working. It's hard to put to you so you'll understand it. You see the place in the street where it's planked over, and the taxi has to slow up, and you start to swear. But, underneath, there's the work gangs, and the lights.

It gives you a pride, in a way, to be part of it—at least, at times. You feel as if the people just walking the streets were different people and didn't know. It's hard for me to explain that—I don't know the way to say it. But I'm glad I did what I did—if it did mean ending up in a change booth, and then the pension. It does for Martha and me.

Eileen always expected more of me, and maybe she was right to do so. But a young man, in his strength, that's bossing a gang—well, that's all a young man might like. He could well be wrong about it, but he'd have to be shown where he was wrong. But, when I found out what was happening, I broke every stick of furniture in the flat. I did so. She wasn't afraid of me, either—I'd have killed her if she had been. But she stood there, cold and proud, with the look she'd had when I first saw her, the look of a woman untouched. He'd come as a boarder because we had the extra room that wasn't needed for the baby after all—a whey-faced, shrewd little man. I wasn't as angry at him, for some



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queer reason—I think he did his best to be decent, through it all. But she was ambitious, always, and we had no children.

Well, he made the money—he made a great deal before he died. Mrs. Loring Masters and the big house on Long Island and the children sent to fine colleges, except for the one that killed himself. When the daughter was married, I saw the picture in the paper, and she had just the look of Eileen. I wished her no ill—I wished her great good fortune. I wished her mother no ill—yet I wondered if the man had really touched her, after all. There were times when we lay beside each other, in our youth, and asked no better. I know that, for that is not something a man forgets. And it was the same with her. But she wanted other than that.

I don't know how to tell it all—I wish I knew. How am I to tell what it's like to come home, to the quiet street, after the night shift, with nothing but the milkman's horse clopping his way along—and be tired to bone and marrow and yet satisfied? How am I to tell what it's like, day after day? The city stretches and you don't notice it, till one day you go to the Park, and the buildings have grown up like a fence around it. I remember talking to my Uncle Matthew. He'd had thirty-five years on the Force and retired as inspector, and he should know if anyone did. Well, he talked about many changes, in an old man's voice, and how there was still as much law in the end of a night stick as in many law books. But he didn't really touch it.

It reminds me of the one time I went to Proctor's when Nellie was on the bill. She did well, and I was shamed to the bone, but I couldn't help applauding. The audience liked her, too—they knew she came from Third Avenue and was one of their own. I've given her change at the window, since, and she didn't know me. Nobody ever looks at the man in the change booth—nobody knows if he has a face. Why should I be worried about that? Well, I'm not, to tell you the truth. But it's given me a chuckle, now and then, when somebody's come along and said, "Why, Ed!"

Have I given you any idea? Most likely not. I've seen Teddy Roosevelt, the young dude back from the war, and his teeth were just the way they are in the pictures. I've shook hands with John McGraw—and seen the sudden, white, Irish rage on his face when somebody yelled "Muggsy" at him out of the crowd. I've



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seen the Mayor, by the Zoo, showing his boy the polar bears—and him in his queer black hat and people leaving him alone. But where do you begin and end? I remember John Pollard, that's educated, telling me once about some city in Europe where you dug down and under the city was the ruins of another city and under that ruin another till you could not come to the end of them. Now that's something any New Yorker could understand. It's Jimmy Walker's town and Rabbi Wise's, it's LaGuardia's and J. P. Morgan's and Cardinal Spellman's, and the new strong hitter on the Yankees' and Katharine Cornell's. It belongs to the telephone repairmen and the Park Avenue dolls, to the fellow that peddles the racing sheets and the choirboys in the Cathedral and all the hackers in their cabs. Now how would I say whose town it was, precisely? Yet I'd like to know.

Well, now, there was my friend Louis Jordan, went into domestic service. It didn't seem work for a man to me, at first, and yet I liked him well. I ran into him first at Joe's place, the summer that Eileen had left me—a very dignified creature, though drink was his weakness. But you could neither smell it nor see it on him—at least at that time. The rich man he worked for had closed his house for the summer and left Louis and his wife the caretaking of it. A dignified creature, I say, with soft, puffy hands and a face not far off a priest's. His wife was a little thin woman, most respectable, in black. But, when he got to know me well, he'd ask me back for a nip, now and then, at the house. Man, dear, you never saw a kitchen stove to equal that one—it could have roasted an ox. Then we'd have our nip and his wife would run the cards for me, very considerate and respectable, for she knew I'd had troubles. And all around us and over us was the big, grand, stately house with its pictures and its fine furniture, and yet we the only things alive in it, like mice in a cheese.

He took me through the whole of it, one warm Sunday afternoon. There was a bathtub of marble, though it looked like dusty stone, and the man of the house had twenty suits left in his closet, and yet he had others, for he'd not appear naked where he was. It gave me a queer feeling to see all those suits, hanging up on their hangers. Then, when we got back to the kitchen, we found that Mrs. Jordan had got hold of the gin bottle and was



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stretched out, highly respectable but stiff as a corpse, on the floor. So, after that, I knew his sorrow, as he had known mine. Yet, the next winter, I happened to pass by the house. There was a red carpet down and all the fine carriages drawing up at the door. And, just as the door opened, I saw Louis Jordan, like a sentinel on post in his dress suit, receiving them all, with the young men to help him. Very fine he looked, and not like the man with his collar off that I'd drunk with, in the kitchen. And she, no doubt, was helping equally, with the ladies. Well, that's a long time ago, and the house is gone.

### III

I've seen some queer sights, I have. I've stuck my head up from a manhole and seen six elephants, marching down Eighth Avenue, holding on to each other's tails. It was only for the circus in Madison Square Garden, but it gave you a turn. Then there was the bar the midgets used to frequent. I don't remember the name of it, but I stumbled in there one night and thought I'd gone mad when all the little faces turned at me. I've seen other things as well. I've seen them shower the ticker tape and the torn paper from the high buildings and got a glimpse of the face of the man they were welcoming. It might be one face or another, but it looked white and dazzled. And next week you'd have forgotten his name.

I used to go to the ball games often, with Martha, and that's a sight, too, when the game goes into extra innings and the crowd sits tight and the shadow begins to grow on the infield. Her brother was with the Giants, for a year—Swede Nansen, they called him—a tall, blond, slow-spoken boy. He could pitch with the best, on his day, but he liked farming better, which is a queer thing in a man. I remember the time he struck out nine Cubs in five innings, and the yelling of the crowd. But the next year his arm went bad on him and nothing could be done for it. He played for Atlanta a while,—the South being recommended for him,—then he gave up the game and settled down to his farming, and now, every Christmas, he sends us a box of pecans. But his record's still in the books, and the game where he beat Alexander. I should like to see him again, for he was a man I respected, but I doubt now that I will.



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She's been a good wife to me, Martha, and never ashamed of a man that worked with his hands—though I do not do so any more. At one time we had the money, and that was a contrary experience. She was left five hundred dollars, and that sharp little fellow, Abe Leavis, told us what to buy. At first I felt queer, going into the grand office, but soon I saw my money was as good as another's. Yet, though I will not criticize any other man's work, it does not seem to me a man's occupation to do nothing but watch the figures change on a blackboard. They thought, for a while, that I was lucky, for those days had no sense to them at all. And indeed, I thought so myself. I've had men in their handmade suits ask me for advice, and take it, too. They'd have taken advice, at that time, from a horse, if the horse was winning on the market. Well, it was forty thousand dollars before it was nothing—so you can say that I've had the experience of riches. It takes a man's mind off his work—that's all I can say. But we had the sealskin coat for Martha—and the washing machine.

If I told you about Abe Leavis, that would be part of it, too. That was a rubber ball of a man, a rubber ball bounced up and down the pavements. I have seen him so thin and pitiful it would break your heart; I have seen him round and plump, with his pockets full of cigars. You could kill that man, but you could not put him down. But how he loved the smell and taste of the city! I'll forgive a man much for that. No, it wasn't my city he loved—it was Fifth and Park and the riches—the big shining toy-store where everything's for sale. It was like a tonic to him to pay maybe twenty dollars for a pair of theatre tickets and get there late for the play. But that's part of it, too.

Now there's whole sections and locations I've never seen. It wasn't so long ago that I visited my grandnephew, Francis. He married a Jewish girl when he'd finished his internship—a pretty, bright young thing—and they've got an apartment on the Grand Concourse. I walked twenty blocks after I'd left them and it was like another city. And yet it couldn't have been any other city. It couldn't have been.

I don't know if it's the two rivers make it—though I knew the captain of the *Michael T. McQuillan*, and a good man he was and told me the work there is to get the big, proud liners into dock. I don't know if it's the climate that makes it—the fine



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fall and the dirty winter, the hot summer and the spring that comes with the flower carts and touches your heart. It's a healthy climate, I've always thought, though others may differ. Now when Martha and I were first married we'd go as far as Far Rockaway for a bite of the summer. And that was a change and healthy—but I noticed we were glad to get back where you knew the look of the streets. I don't know—I couldn't say—it's hard for me to tell.

Well, now, there's the being old. But we got along very comfortable. There's a lot of them move away—to Florida, let's say—and then they send you the postcards, saying what a fine time they're having. No doubt they are, if they like it, but I never could see it made them look any younger. There was my friend, the Dutchman, that retired from his delicatessen and went to live with his granddaughter at White Plains. It was a nice house, to be sure, and he kept the lawn very well cut. I congratulated him on that. Then he looked at me and there was a grief in his eyes. "Vy, Ed," he said, "it's all right. But you can't cut the lawn all day. I tell you, some nights, I vake up and listen for the noise of the El. And, ven it ain't there, I feel old. Ed, I'd give ten dollars if Mrs. Burke was to come in—the fussy one—just to tell me she wouldn't put up with this kind of service no more." Then his granddaughter came to tell him it was time for his nap, and, though she was very polite, I knew I should go away. Thank God, I've been spared that—though we've neither chick nor child.

It's cool enough in the flat, and if there's a breeze we get it. And there's always something to look at—the boys playing ball in the streets, shouting under the light, summer evenings, and the taxis drawing up to the apartment house opposite, and a young woman coming out, with bare arms. Phil Kelly, the doorman there, is a friend of mine, though he comes from Ulster. They'd be surprised, in that house, if they knew the things that I know about them. I don't mean any ugly things—just the odd little circumstances. It's my hope that the pretty dark girl will marry the young man with glasses. He's steadier than the one that's better-dressed. I'd like to tell her that, only how would I tell her?

There isn't a trace or a place of my childhood's house. There isn't a trace or a place of the house where I lived with Eileen. Now last year, when I went to the cemetery, it took me an



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hour to find Uncle Martin's grave, though they'd kept it decent, and he was a well-known man.

You'd think such a thing might make you sad, but again, it does not. It's comfortable, in a way, to be like the dust in the air. It's hard for me to tell it, and yet, what I mean is this. Last summer I went to the Fair, and that's a great sight, no doubt of it. Oh, the crowds and the proud buildings of the nations of the earth and the horns tooting "All around the town"!

It was some State Day when we went there, and there was the Governor of the State, with the sirens blowing in front of him to clear the way. Well, I wouldn't remember which State it was, but that makes little difference. There were all the top hats there to receive him, and that's only courtesy. And yet he was swallowed up in the Fair itself, and, except for the people from his own State, there was no one knew he was there, or cared at all. So it came upon me, that day—sitting on a bench, with my feet tired—it all came upon me. For they all seemed to pass by me, the rich and the great and the proud, with the sirens blowing in front of them. And yet, that wasn't the city, and when the Fair itself was finished, there'd be many still in the city that hadn't even seen it. It was a fine sight to see, but they hadn't missed it, in their lives.

And so it was with the most of us—and with the city itself. For it wasn't the mayors and the millionaires and the Presidents—though I've walked by the President's house and seen him go in. It was my Uncle Ally and my Uncle Matthew, my friend Louis Jordan and my sister, Nellie O'Mara, the boys that were on the gang with me and the boys that died underground. It's the small, new honeymoon couples, buying a coffee ring at the corner bakery, and the guards who walk the museums, clean and pudgy; the thieves in the morning round-up and the good men, like my old man, who live and die without notice. It's all that, and the moon at the end of the street where you never expected a moon.

I said, "Martha, I'm tired, I think," and she took me home. So next day, when I was no better, she called my grandnephew, Francis. He's been very kind, and, where some might be afraid of the hospital, I am not. It's a good, sunny room, the ward, and the nurses very attentive to an old man. From where I lie on my back, I can see the river.



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So, since it's to be that way, I'm glad it's to be that way. Wouldn't I have been the fool to go to a place like White Plains and die there? A man could hardly die easy in those foreign places—a man who's seen what I've seen. I'm aware there are other cities. The day orderly comes from London, and we've talked about that one.

I was born in Brooklyn, but we moved to the East Side, afterwards. I remember my mother's baking bread, and the Empire State, when it was new. You won't remember Swede Nansen, though his record's in the book, but I remember him. You won't remember Martin O'Mara, but he was part of it. You won't remember Logan's on Fourteenth Street, but it was a fine, large store.

When they bomb the town to pieces, with their planes from the sky, there'll be a big ghost left. When it's gone, they'd better let the sea come in and cover it, for there never will be one like it in the ages of man again.